

TEACHER BACKGROUND & PREPARATION SHEET

For Teacher Study Only - Not Read Aloud

LESSON IDENTIFICATION

Week #: 40

Date: October 4, 2026

Lesson Title: Jesus Teaches About God's Kingdom

Primary Scripture Passage(s): Matthew 13:1-23, 31-33, 44-46

Bible Timeline Placement: During the public ministry of Jesus in Galilee, after He had begun preaching, teaching, healing, and calling people to follow Him.

The scheduled topic for this week is Jesus teaching about God's Kingdom through parables. Matthew 13 provides an especially helpful collection because Jesus Himself explains why He uses parables and because several of these parables directly describe "the kingdom of heaven."

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON

Children should begin to understand that God's Kingdom is not merely another name for heaven after we die. God's Kingdom means God's rightful rule as King. Jesus came announcing that Kingdom, showing its power, calling people into it, and revealing Himself as its King.

Matthew 13 helps us see several truths together. God's Word is received differently by different hearts. God's Kingdom may begin in ways that appear small, yet God causes His purposes to grow. The Kingdom is more valuable than anything we could possess, and belonging to the King is worth everything.

Most importantly, children must not leave thinking, "I need to make myself into good soil" or "I need to work harder so I can earn God's Kingdom." Jesus is the King who came to rescue sinners who could never rescue themselves. He calls people to hear His Word, turn from sin, trust Him, and receive the life only He can give.

This lesson should therefore help children see not merely what the Kingdom is like, but who the King is.

BOOK & PASSAGE BACKGROUND

Book Name: Matthew

Traditional Author: Matthew, also called Levi, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus and formerly a tax collector. Matthew 9:9 records Jesus calling him to follow.

Approximate Date Written: The precise date is debated. Many conservative scholars place Matthew somewhere within the first century, commonly between the middle and later decades of that century. Scripture itself does not give the date, so teachers should not present an exact year as certain.

Original Audience: Matthew appears especially concerned with readers who understood the Old Testament and Jewish expectations concerning the Messiah. Throughout the Gospel, Matthew repeatedly explains how Jesus fulfills what God had promised in the Scriptures.

Purpose of the Book: Matthew presents Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of God, and the rightful King. The Gospel begins by identifying Jesus as "the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" in Matthew 1:1 and repeatedly shows Him fulfilling Old Testament promises.

Matthew also emphasizes Jesus' teaching about the "kingdom of heaven." This phrase does not mean that Jesus was only explaining what heaven is like. It refers to God's royal rule, His authority, and His saving work reaching into the world through the King He promised.

The current Christian and Missionary Alliance Statement of Faith likewise confesses Jesus as true God and true man who died for sinners, rose from the dead, and will come again to establish His Kingdom of righteousness and peace.

HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXT

Matthew 13 opens beside the Sea of Galilee. Jesus leaves the house, sits beside the lake, and such a large crowd gathers that He gets into a boat while the people remain along the shore.

This was not a classroom with desks, notebooks, and a whiteboard. Jesus taught ordinary people using things they already understood. They knew fields, seed, hard walking paths, weeds, bread dough, merchants, valuable possessions, and the difference between planting something and seeing its full harvest months later.

Many of Jesus' parables were drawn from ordinary rural life in first century Palestine, including sowing, harvesting, mustard plants, bread making, hidden treasure, and commerce. Those familiar pictures allowed Jesus to place spiritual truth beside something His listeners could already picture.

A parable is more than merely "a made up story with a lesson." Jesus used ordinary pictures or brief accounts to reveal truth about God, His Kingdom, and the people who hear His Word. We should also remember that Jesus' parables sometimes exposed the condition of the listener. Matthew 13:10-17 makes clear that people could hear the same teaching while responding very differently.

This is important for teachers. The power of a parable does not come from discovering a secret meaning hidden inside every tiny detail. The meaning comes from following the point Jesus is making.

A wise rule for interpreting parables is therefore: Do not make every object represent something unless Jesus or the context gives us a reason to do so.

Matthew 13 itself demonstrates this beautifully. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus explains the meaning of the soils. We can confidently teach those meanings because Jesus gives them. In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, however, we should not invent symbolic identities for the farmer, every branch, every bird, or every leaf when Jesus does not explain them that way.

IMMEDIATE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

What happens before this passage? Matthew 11 and 12 show increasingly divided reactions to Jesus. Some people are listening, some are questioning, and some religious leaders are resisting Him strongly. Jesus performs genuine works of God, yet in Matthew 12:24 some Pharisees accuse Him of working through the power of Satan. Jesus responds seriously to their unbelief and exposes the danger of hearts that continually resist what God has revealed.

That setting matters when Matthew 13 begins. Jesus is teaching about seeds falling onto different kinds of ground because people standing before Him are already responding differently to the very same King.

What happens after this passage? After finishing these parables, Jesus returns to His hometown. Matthew 13:53-58 records that many there are astonished by Him but still refuse to believe. That means Matthew 13 is surrounded by real examples of the very truth Jesus teaches. The seed is being scattered. Some receive it. Some reject it. The problem is not that the seed lacks power. The problem is the condition of the hearer.

Why this moment matters in God's plan: Jesus is revealing how God's Kingdom is arriving in a way many people did not expect. Many Jews living under Roman rule longed for God to defeat Israel's enemies and establish His Kingdom openly. Jesus truly is the promised King, yet His first coming did not begin with armies marching against Rome. The Kingdom arrived with the King preaching repentance, forgiving sinners, healing the sick, defeating demonic powers, calling disciples, and announcing God's good news.

There would eventually be a visible and final Kingdom when Christ returns, but the Kingdom was already breaking into history through Jesus. This helps explain the mustard seed. Something may begin in a form that appears surprisingly small while still belonging to an enormous plan of God.

KEY THEOLOGICAL TRUTHS — APPLIED TO THIS WEEK'S LESSON

CORE TRUTH #1: GOD IS KING

The Kingdom belongs first to God. Jesus did not invent a new idea when He preached about God's Kingdom. The Old Testament repeatedly describes God as King. Psalm 103:19 says that the Lord has established His

throne in heaven and His Kingdom rules over all. That means the Kingdom begins with God's authority, not ours.

The Bible is not mainly telling children how to become important people. It is revealing the King before whom every person lives. Jesus teaches His disciples to pray in Matthew 6:10, "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." God's Kingdom therefore includes God's will being done because God is King.

CORE TRUTH #2: JESUS IS THE KING

Matthew has been preparing the reader for this from the opening chapter. Jesus is called the "son of David" in Matthew 1:1. God had promised David that his royal line would have lasting significance, and the prophets looked forward to a righteous King whom God would send.

Jesus does not merely teach information about somebody else's kingdom. The King Himself is standing in the boat teaching the crowd. This becomes even clearer across the whole Gospel. After His resurrection Jesus declares in Matthew 28:18 that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him.

The children should eventually understand this central truth: God's Kingdom cannot be separated from Jesus because Jesus is the King.

CORE TRUTH #3: GOD'S WORD REVEALS WHAT IS IN OUR HEARTS

In Matthew 13:3-9 Jesus tells of a farmer scattering seed. Some seed falls on the path, some on rocky ground, some among thorns, and some in good soil. Jesus then explains the parable in Matthew 13:18-23. The seed represents the message about the Kingdom, while the different soils picture different responses to that message.

The same truth is heard, yet it does not produce the same response in every person. Some hear and do not understand. Some respond quickly but do not endure trouble. Some allow worries and the desire for wealth to choke out what they heard. Others hear, understand, and produce fruit.

Teachers should be careful here. We should not encourage children to spend the lesson anxiously trying to decide which soil they are, as though salvation depended upon diagnosing themselves perfectly. Jesus is calling His listeners to truly hear Him. The proper response is humble faith. When God speaks, we should not harden ourselves against Him. Hebrews 3:15 later gives the same warning: when we hear God's voice, we should not harden our hearts.

CORE TRUTH #4: GOD'S KINGDOM CAN BEGIN SMALL AND GROW FAR BEYOND WHAT WE EXPECT

Jesus says in Matthew 13:31-32 that the Kingdom is like a mustard seed that a man plants in his field. The contrast is the point: a small beginning and remarkable growth.

Teachers may encounter the question, "But is a mustard seed really the smallest seed in the whole world?" This is an excellent opportunity to teach children how to handle Bible questions without fear.

The mustard seed was proverbially associated with extreme smallness in the world Jesus' listeners knew. Ancient Jewish usage employed the mustard seed as an example of something very tiny, and Jesus' comparison works naturally within the agricultural setting of His audience.

Jesus was not giving the crowd a worldwide botany chart. He was making a comparison they understood. A child today might say, "I have a million things to do," without claiming that exactly 1,000,000 tasks are written on a list. Ordinary speech communicates meaning according to the way words are being used.

Jesus' point is clear: God can bring astonishing results from beginnings that appear very small. Twelve disciples did not look like the beginning of a worldwide movement. A Galilean teacher surrounded by ordinary people did not look like the arrival of history's eternal King. Yet Revelation describes redeemed people from every nation, tribe, people, and language worshiping Christ. Never despise what God can do through what appears small.

CORE TRUTH #5: GOD'S KINGDOM IS WORTH MORE THAN EVERYTHING WE COULD OWN

Matthew 13:44-46 contains two short parables. A man discovers treasure in a field, and a merchant finds an exceptionally valuable pearl. In each case the person recognizes that what has been found is worth more than what he currently possesses.

The point is not that salvation can be purchased. Scripture plainly teaches the opposite. Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches that salvation is by grace through faith and not something we earn by works.

Jesus is teaching about value. When someone truly recognizes who Jesus is and what His Kingdom means, nothing else can rightly compete with Him for first place. The Kingdom is not one valuable item among many. The King is worth everything.

WHAT DOES "THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN" MEAN?

This phrase needs careful explanation before we teach children. "Kingdom of heaven" does not simply mean "the place Christians go when they die." Matthew often uses "kingdom of heaven" where other Gospel writers use "kingdom of God." At its heart, the idea concerns God's royal rule.

There is a present aspect and a future aspect. God is already King over everything. Jesus brought the saving rule of God into history in a decisive new way through His first coming. People who trust Jesus belong to His Kingdom now. Yet the world is not presently experiencing the Kingdom in its final completed form. Sin remains, people suffer, death remains, and creation groans. Jesus will return.

When He does, His rule will be openly and finally established in righteousness. This guards children from two errors. The first is thinking that God is not King until people decide to let Him be King. The second is thinking that Christians should expect life now to look exactly like the final Kingdom, with every sickness healed and every painful circumstance immediately removed.

Jesus is King now. His Kingdom is real now. Its final fullness is still coming. The Christian and Missionary Alliance's Fourfold Gospel expresses this hope by identifying Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King.

GOD AS TRINITY

The project standard teaches the children this simple, faithful statement: God is one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Matthew 13 is primarily focused on Jesus the Son teaching about the Father's Kingdom, so we should not force every Person of the Trinity artificially into each parable. Still, the larger Gospel of Matthew gives us a clear Trinitarian picture.

The Father is God. Jesus Christ the Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. There is one God, not three gods. Jesus later commands His followers to baptize disciples "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" in Matthew 28:19.

For this week, the Trinity connection should remain simple: the Son has come from the Father, the Son reveals the Kingdom, and the Holy Spirit opens hearts, gives new life, lives within believers, and produces the fruit of a life being changed by God.

We should not use water, eggs, clovers, or other analogies. Those illustrations usually make one God seem like three pieces or one Person changing forms, neither of which accurately describes the biblical Trinity.

CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE ALIGNMENT

The Fourfold Gospel is naturally present in this lesson without forcing four separate teachings.

Christ Our Savior: We enter God's Kingdom because Jesus saves sinners, not because we earn admission through good behavior. Jesus later explains that He came "to give his life as a ransom for many" in Matthew 20:28.

Christ Our Sanctifier: The fruitful soil gives us a natural opening to discuss a changed life, but carefully. Fruit does not purchase salvation. Fruit grows because God has given life. Jesus changes people who belong to Him. The Holy Spirit works within believers so their lives increasingly reflect Christ. For children, we can say:

"Jesus forgives us, and He keeps working in us through the Holy Spirit to help us become more like Him."

Christ Our Healer: Healing is not the central subject of Matthew 13, so this should not be forced into the lesson. Still, Matthew's surrounding chapters repeatedly show Jesus healing people as a sign of His compassion, authority, and the arrival of God's Kingdom. We may acknowledge that Jesus is powerful and compassionate and that Christians may pray for healing, while never teaching that enough faith guarantees the physical outcome we want.

Christ Our Coming King: This connection is especially strong. The Kingdom Jesus describes will not remain hidden forever. Jesus will return. Matthew 13 itself points forward to the "end of the age" in the explanation of the weeds in verses 39-43, even though that particular parable will not need to carry the child lesson.

RELIABILITY OF SCRIPTURE

The apologetic emphasis this week should not be built around trying to "prove" every parable happened, because parables are intentionally told illustrations. Jesus is not claiming there was necessarily one identifiable farmer whose seed fell on exactly four kinds of soil or one identifiable merchant whose pearl can now be located archaeologically. That would misunderstand the literary form.

The historical claim is that Jesus of Nazareth taught in parables, and the Gospel accounts preserve those teachings within His historical ministry. The parables themselves also fit naturally within the world of first century Galilee. Farming, sowing, household bread preparation, mustard cultivation, merchants, fields, and valuable goods belonged to the ordinary cultural environment of Jesus' listeners.

This gives us an important apologetic principle: Trusting Scripture does not mean pretending every kind of writing in Scripture works in the same way. The Bible contains history, songs, prophecy, letters, wisdom sayings, and parables. Reading the Bible faithfully means asking what kind of passage God has given us and understanding it according to that form.

APOLOGETICS FOUNDATION

1. What does the Bible really say? Jesus says God's Kingdom is "like" these things. He is comparing spiritual truth with familiar images. The text itself tells us we are hearing parables. Therefore, we should not treat a parable like a modern scientific report or claim that every detail must correspond to an independent theological truth.

2. What do we know from history or ordinary evidence? The farming and household imagery belongs naturally to ancient Galilean life. Mustard seed was used proverbially as an image of very small size, and mustard plants could grow surprisingly large compared with the seed from which they began.

3. What are we only guessing about? We do not know exactly where every particular example Jesus had in mind may have occurred. We do not know the identity of a historical farmer behind the Sower because Jesus does not identify one. We do not know which specific field Jesus pictured in the hidden treasure parable. We should not invent those details. We also should not confidently assign symbolic meanings to details Jesus never interprets.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION: DID JESUS SAY SOMETHING SCIENTIFICALLY WRONG ABOUT THE MUSTARD SEED?

A child may eventually encounter someone saying: "Jesus said the mustard seed is the smallest seed, but smaller seeds exist. Doesn't that mean Jesus was wrong?" Teachers should not become defensive.

Begin with what the passage actually is. Jesus is giving a parable to people living in an agricultural culture. He is using a seed famous in their speech for being tiny and contrasting its tiny beginning with unusually large growth.

That means the objection asks the parable to do something Jesus was not trying to do. We use similar language constantly. Someone may call a newborn baby "the tiniest little thing" without claiming to have measured every baby on earth. The statement communicates according to ordinary speech. We should therefore be confident without exaggerating the evidence.

ANTICIPATED CHILD QUESTIONS

"What is a kingdom?" A kingdom is the place and people under the rule of a king. When Jesus talks about God's Kingdom, He is talking about God ruling as King. God made everything and already has authority over everything, and Jesus came to rescue people from sin and bring them under His good rule.

"Where is God's Kingdom?" God's Kingdom is already at work wherever the King is ruling and His saving work is taking place, but we are still waiting for Jesus to return and make everything right completely. Christians belong to Jesus now, and we are also waiting for His Kingdom to be revealed in its fullness.

"Is heaven the same thing as the Kingdom of heaven?" They are closely connected, but they are not exactly the same idea. "Heaven" can refer to God's dwelling. "The Kingdom of heaven" emphasizes God's rule. Jesus teaches us not merely where God is but who rules.

"Why did Jesus tell parables instead of just telling everyone the answer?" Sometimes Jesus does give direct answers. In Matthew 13, however, His parables both reveal truth and expose whether people really want to hear Him. Matthew 13:9 says, "Whoever has ears, let them hear." The issue is not physical ears. Jesus is calling people to listen with hearts ready to receive God's truth.

"Why didn't everybody believe Jesus if they saw His miracles?" Seeing evidence does not automatically create faith. Some people saw what Jesus did and still resisted Him. Matthew 12 shows religious leaders witnessing His work while rejecting His identity. Unbelief is therefore not always caused by a lack of information. Scripture also speaks about hearts that resist God.

"Can I make myself good soil?" Children should not be taught to save themselves. Jesus is calling us to hear Him, trust Him, and receive His Word. God is the One who gives new life. We respond to Him in repentance and faith.

"Do I have to sell everything I own to go to heaven because the man sold everything for the treasure?" No. The parable is describing the incomparable value of God's Kingdom, not giving every Christian a command to duplicate the exact action of the man in the illustration. Salvation is God's gift, not something we purchase.

"Does the mustard seed prove the Bible has a mistake?" No. Jesus is using ordinary first century language in a parable, not writing a scientific encyclopedia entry. The mustard seed was famously used to describe something extremely small, and the contrast between its small beginning and impressive growth makes Jesus' point clearly.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Misunderstanding 1: "The Kingdom of God just means heaven after we die." Correction: The Kingdom is God's rule. Eternal life with Christ is part of our hope, but the biblical idea is larger than a destination after death.

Misunderstanding 2: "The parables are just cute moral stories." Correction: Jesus' parables reveal serious truth about God, His Kingdom, salvation, judgment, faith, and the human heart.

Misunderstanding 3: "Every single object in a parable has a secret meaning." Correction: Sometimes Jesus explains specific details, as He does with the Sower. Other times He gives one central comparison. We should follow Scripture instead of inventing symbolism.

Misunderstanding 4: "Good soil means good people earn salvation." Correction: Salvation is by God's grace. A fruitful life follows genuine faith. It does not purchase it.

Misunderstanding 5: "The hidden treasure teaches that we can buy our way into the Kingdom." Correction: The point is value, not purchase. God's Kingdom is worth more than everything else.

Misunderstanding 6: "The mustard seed means Christians will always become successful or powerful." Correction: Jesus is teaching about God's Kingdom and God's purposes, not promising individual believers earthly wealth, popularity, influence, or an easy life.

Misunderstanding 7: "If God's Kingdom is here, bad things should never happen." Correction: The Kingdom is already present through the reign and saving work of Christ, but its final fullness awaits His return. Christians still experience grief, sickness, temptation, injustice, and death while waiting for the Coming King.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Matthew 13 should move naturally toward the gospel because the Kingdom requires a King, and sinners need rescue before they can joyfully live under His rule.

God is holy and good. He made us for Himself. Yet every one of us has sinned. Romans 3:23 teaches that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. We cannot remove our own guilt by becoming nicer people. We cannot earn our way into God's Kingdom.

Jesus is God the Son who became truly human while remaining truly God. He lived without sin. He obeyed where we have disobeyed. He willingly died on the cross for our sins. First Peter 3:18 explains that Christ suffered for sins, "the righteous for the unrighteous," in order to bring us to God.

Jesus truly died and truly rose again. The King defeated death. Those who turn from sin and place their trust in Jesus are forgiven, made new, and brought into His Kingdom. Colossians 1:13-14 later describes believers as rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son, in whom we have redemption and forgiveness.

The Gospel therefore answers the deepest question raised by the parables. How can people with sinful hearts belong to the holy King? Because the King came to save them. Jesus is not merely the teacher standing beside the lake explaining the Kingdom. Jesus is the Savior who opens the way into it.

TEACHER HEART PREPARATION

Before teaching children about the different soils, it is worth allowing Jesus' words to reach us first. Teachers can become so accustomed to preparing lessons that Scripture begins to feel like material we handle rather than the living Word through which God addresses us.

Matthew 13 quietly asks every listener whether we are still listening, not merely hearing sound, but listening, receiving, and allowing the Word of Christ to correct us where we are wrong and strengthen us where we are weak.

Some of us know what it feels like to have worries crowd our hearts. Jesus speaks about seed choked by the worries of life, and that image probably lands differently when adulthood has given us plenty to worry about. The answer is not to pretend those pressures are unreal. The answer is to remember the value of the King.

The treasure is still treasure when life is difficult. The seed is still alive when growth feels slow. The Kingdom is still advancing when we cannot see everything God is doing, and Jesus is still King when the world around us looks nothing like a kingdom of righteousness.

That is where the Coming King becomes more than a doctrine on paper. It becomes hope. For the teacher preparing this lesson, that means we do not need to make children impressed with our explanation of the parables. We are helping them see Jesus.

Pray that God will give you patience with the child who asks the unexpected question, tenderness with the child who is carrying worries you cannot see, wisdom with the child who has never heard the word "kingdom," and faithfulness to let Scripture say exactly what Scripture says.

The little seed may not look like much when it goes into the ground. Neither does a Sunday morning conversation with a seven year old always look like something that will matter twenty years from now. But the Kingdom belongs to God. We sow His Word faithfully, and we trust the King with what grows.

TEACHER PRAYER

Father, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and King. Help me hear Your Word before I teach it to anyone else. Guard me from adding things You have not said or making complicated what You have made clear. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit so I can speak truth with patience, warmth, and courage. Help the children hear the words of Jesus and recognize that His Kingdom is more valuable than anything this

world can offer. Where hearts are frightened, bring peace. Where hearts are distracted, draw them toward Christ. Where there is sin, lead to repentance and forgiveness. Where there are questions, give us honesty and confidence in Your Word. Above everything, let these children see that Jesus is alive, Jesus saves, Jesus is King, and Jesus will come again. Amen.